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Critics generally agree that the presentation of the American dream in The Great Gatsby and An American Tragedy is an indictment of American society. Few critics, however, acknowledge the similarities in characterization, theme, and conclusion between these two novels.

Using a close reading of the texts and critical opinions of the two novels, this paper points out and examines the deficiencies in the American social system seen by the two authors and the means they use in indicting that society. Jay Gatsby and Clyde Griffiths represent aspiration in America. Both Clyde and Gatsby struggle to achieve wealth and the glamorous life of the wealthy. Fitzgerald and Dreiser suggest fully the extent to which each of their protagonists will violate law and morality in the pursuit of their dreams. Finally, the indictment of American society may be seen in the failure of Gatsby and Clyde to achieve their dreams and the destruction of both characters. Since the novels were both published in 1925, it seems that, unknown to each other, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Theodore Dreiser were uniting to form a kind of American archetype showing the impossibility of achieving the American dream of wealth, success, and glamor.

THE INDICTMENT OF AMERICA IN 1925;
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE GREAT GATSBY
AND AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

by

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INTRODUCTION

Critics generally agree that the presentation of the failure of the American dream in The Great Gatsby and An American Tragedy indicates a definite criticism--if not indictment--of American society.[1] However, few critics acknowledge the similarities in characterization, theme, and conclusion between these two novels.[2]

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[1]Since Marius Bewley's article in 1954, critics have agreed on this point concerning The Great Gatsby: Marius Bewley, "Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America," Sewanee Review, LXII, Spring (1954), in The Eccentric Design (New York, 1959). Similarly, most Dreiser scholars acknowledge the social criticism apparent in An American Tragedy: Carl Van Doren, The American Novel: 1789-1939 (New York, 1940), p. 257; Gerald Willen, "Dreiser's Moral Seriousness," The University of Kansas City Review, XXIII, Spring (1957), 185-186; Frederick J. Hoffman, "The Scene of Violence: Dostoevsky and Dreiser," Modern Fiction Studies, VI, Summer (1960), 101.

[2]See Irving Howe, "Afterword," An American Tragedy, by Theodore Dreiser (New York, 1964), p. 819; Robert Sklar, F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Last Laocoön (New York, 1967), pp. 252-253; and Sheldon N. Grebstein, "An American Tragedy: Theme and Structure," in The Twenties, ed. Richard E. Langford and William E. Taylor (DeLand, Florida, 1966), p. 64. Grebstein feels that "An American Tragedy tells another part of the story Fitzgerald recorded in The Great Gatsby. The analogy need not be carried too far, but Clyde Griffiths and Jay Gatsby have kinship, as do Sondra Finchley and Daisy Buchanan. Clyde and Gatsby pursue the same dream, the dream of an orgiastic future embodied in a beautiful girl with a voice like the sound of money; both pursue it passionately but illicitly, and with similarly disastrous results. There the comparison of the two books should probably end, but clearly it is more than a coincidence that two novels so superficially different yet thematically alike should by published in the same year and should come to the same mordaunt conclusions about American life."

The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald's most successful novel, was published in April 1925 and was a brilliant third novel. He had previously published This Side of Paradise in 1920 and The Beautiful and Damned in 1922.[3] An American Tragedy, however, was almost the last of Dreiser's succession of novels which began in 1900, twenty-five years before. Published in December 1925, it is considered Dreiser's greatest success.[4]

Both Dreiser and Fitzgerald chose the theme of aspiration for their novels because they realized from their own experience the pressure to succeed in America. Even late in his life, Dreiser never forgot the struggles of his earlier life of poverty. Fitzgerald, however, lived only in the present, spending his wealth as soon as--or even before--he got it. Thus, considering the differences in the outlooks of these two authors, it is amazing that they would publish in the same year, two novels so similar in characterization and theme which come to the same gruesome conclusions about American life. In fact, unknown to each other, Dreiser and Fitzgerald were uniting to form a kind of American archetype showing the impossibility of achieving the American dream of wealth, success, and glamor.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, the myth of America

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[3]Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise, A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald (Boston, 1951), p. 351.

[4]Van Doren, p. 258.

as a new Eden had already begun to grow. One hundred and fifty years later in 1925, Dreiser and Fitzgerald realized that the American dream was corrupt. They seemed to agree that American society creates an intense longing for self-betterment, yet also has raised economic standards such that attainment of the dream is legally impossible. Furthermore, the authors seemed intent on emphasizing the particular Americanness of their books. Testifying to this in Dreiser's novel is the title, An American Tragedy. Previously, the title had been Mirage, indicative of the substance of the dream of success and luxury.[5] Similarly, Fitzgerald seemed to have been aware of the national significance of The Great Gatsby when he wired Max Perkins on March 19, 1925, twenty-two days before publication: "Crazy about title under the red white and blue what would be delay?"[6] Both authors felt that their stories were representative of American aspiration.

The two novels show the reactionary situation of the nation in the twenties which caused the two authors to condemn America and the American dream. Frederick J. Hoffman explains that the end of World War I found the United States a country of "industrial giants" and "moral dwarfs." Blaming the state of the nation on the previous generation, many

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[5]Charles Shapiro, Theodore Dreiser (Carbondale, Illinois, 1962), p. 93.

[6]Andrew Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1962), p. 149.

young people rejected authority by retreating to Europe in a search for idealism, impossible in an America hampered by its Puritan background and lack of culture.[7]

The purpose of this paper is to point out and examine the deficiencies seen by two authors in the American social system which were responsible for the failure of the American dream, and the means the authors used in indicting that society, through a comparative analysis of The Great Gatsby and An American Tragedy. This discussion will examine the similarities in the backgrounds of Jay Gatsby and Clyde Griffiths, the quality of their dreams, their blindness to morality as a result of their desire, and the indictment of society expressed by the authors through the failure of the dream and the destruction of the characters.

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[7]The Twenties (New York, 1955), pp. 29-30, 40, and 52.

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUNDS OF JAY GATSBY AND CLYDE GRIFFITHS

Both The Great Gatsby and An American Tragedy are the stories of poor, midwestern boys who conceive a dream of materialistic success. Neither Gatsby nor Clyde is responsible for conceiving the dream he pursues. Their desire for material wealth develops because of a social system which divides the population into classes according to wealth. Therefore, the only proper and self-respecting ambition for any poor boy would be to climb into the fabled world of high society and riches. Contact with the upper class increases the aspiration which is inherent in both characters. Thus, the dream grows.

It is only, however, by relinquishing their homes and their moral uprightness that Gatsby and Clyde are able to attempt to satisfy their materialistic hungers. The pattern which both characters follow from their poverty-stricken backgrounds to their final destruction is presented in both novels as characteristic of aspiration in America and representative of a particular type of American tragedy. Their stories, furthermore, are an indictment of the American social class system--its hypocrisy, its dishonesty, and its underlying and pervasive corruption.

Both Dreiser and Fitzgerald chose poor boys with driving ambitions for their novels. Helen Dreiser explains in My Life With Dreiser that Dreiser felt the "most interesting story of the day concerned not only the boy getting the girl, but more emphatically, the poor boy getting the rich girl. Also, he came to know that it was a natural outgrowth of the crude pioneering conditions of American life up to that time, based on the glorification of wealth which started with the early days of slavery and persisted throughout our history."[1] Fitzgerald also recognized the interest in the truly American story. Edwin Fussell states: "Gatsby performs contemporary variations on an old American pattern, the rags-to-riches story exalted by American legend as early as Crevecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer. But the saga is primarily that of a legendary Benjamin Franklin, whose celebrated youthful resolutions are parodied in those that the adolescent Gatsby wrote on the back flyleaf of his copy of Hopalong Cassidy."[2]

The poverty and lack of success of their families cause Jay Gatsby and Clyde Griffiths to feel shame, torment, and a desire for freedom from all that their families represent.

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[1]Charles Shapiro, Theodore Dreiser: Our Bitter Patriot (Carbondale, Illinois, 1962), p. 92, quoting Helen Dreiser in My Life With Dreiser, pp. 71-72, 76.

[2]Edwin S. Fussell, "Fitzgerald's Brave New World," ELH, XIX (December 1952), 296.

Charles Shapiro describes the early emotional state of Clyde: "Clyde was aware that his parents were different, more religious and certainly more isolated, and he felt ashamed. He felt left out of the excitement America had to offer."[3] Dreiser describes Clyde's father as a figure which "bespoke more of failure than anything else," while his mother is a woman who seems to have accomplished "self-preservation, if not success in life."[4] Being a part of a family of street preachers seems "shabby and even degrading" to Clyde (AT, p. 10). He wishes he did not have to take part in the singing and preaching for two reasons; he wishes to have friends and be like boys of his own age, and he cannot understand how or why a benevolent God would reward his family's piety and dedication with poverty when "comforts and pleasures" seemed common enough to others (AT, pp. 9-10). George J. Becker says of Clyde: "From the very beginning Clyde is oppressed by the contrast between the shabby, hand-to-mouth existence which his family leads and the apparent ease and glamor of life for others whom he sees at school or on the streets. Not only does he have nothing, but he has no skill or knowledge that can lead to anything."[5]

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[3]Shapiro, p. 94.

[4]Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (New York, 1964), p. 8. Subsequent references to this novel refer to this edition and will be indicated in the text of this paper.

[5]"Theodore Dreiser: The Realist as Social Critic," Twentieth Century Literature, I (October 1955), 124.

Clyde, however, thinks himself superior to the other members of his family; he feels he deserves a better life than what he has. Dreiser writes: "Clyde was as vain and proud as he was poor. He was one of those interesting individuals who looked upon himself as a thing apart--never quite wholly and indissolubly merged with the family of which he was a member, and never with any profound obligations to those who had been responsible for his coming into the world" (AT, p. 18). Shapiro feels that Clyde's vanity is carefully documented in the expressions of his selfishness.[6]

As Clyde comes to recognize the importance of money, the shame he feels for his family's poverty and their mission work causes him to lie about his parents. On one of his first job interviews when Clyde has to answer what his father does for a living, he replies that he "canvassed for a washing machine and wringer company--and on Sundays preached" (AT, p. 36). Later, he tells his uncle that his father and mother now have their own church with a lodging house connected with it which they also run (AT, p. 173). Actually, the family are now in Denver, continuing their mission work by preaching to people on the streets. Clyde also keeps the truth of his family and their poverty from Sondra Finchley and her friends by telling them that his father owns a small hotel out west (AT, p. 323). Even Clyde's

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[6]Shapiro, p. 108.

lower class girlfriend, Roberta Alden, assumes he is fairly wealthy until he finds it convenient to reveal his poverty when she is in need of an abortion for his baby (AT, p. 387). Thus, Clyde's shame makes him alter his family's circumstances so as to provide for himself a socially acceptable background.

Similarly, James Gatz cannot accept for himself the poverty of the family into which he is born. Fitzgerald says of Gatsby: "His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people--his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all."[7] Therefore, feeling he must have a better life, Gatz develops a concept of the man he wishes to become and calls himself Jay Gatsby: "He invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end" (G, p. 99). As a man, Gatsby denies even the existence of his parents, telling Nick Carraway he is the son of some wealthy people from the Middle West who are "all dead now" (G, p. 65). The shame he feels for his parents develops not because of their dedication to what he believes is a false standard (as does Clyde's), but because of their lack of dedication and incentive as well as their poverty. Both men instinctively seem to feel that their ultimate ends would suffer from the contamination of very humble

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[7]F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1925), p. 99. Subsequent references to this novel refer to this edition and will be indicated in the text of this paper.

beginnings.

Gatsby and Clyde plan to achieve richer lives than those of their youths. From the age of twelve, Clyde thinks constantly of "how he might better himself, if he had a chance; places to which he might go, things he might see, and how differently he might live, if only this, that and the other things were true" (AT, p. 14). Similarly, Gatsby, as a young man, conceives fantastic dreams of what his future will hold. Fitzgerald says: "A universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain while the clock ticked on the wash-stand and the moon soaked with wet light his tangled clothes upon the floor" (G, pp. 99-100). The lack of material goods in Clyde and Gatsby's childhoods causes them to have these daydreams of the possibility of a more fulfilling future.

Both boys, however, realize that they must work in order to achieve even their most basic desires. Clyde drops out of school to take a job as a soda clerk, but the money he begins to make and the people he comes in contact with do not satisfy his desires, but only increase them (AT, p. 29). Therefore, he seeks a higher paying job as a bellhop at the Hotel Green-Davidson. The extreme poverty and lack of beauty which has characterized Clyde's life thus far are emphasized by his reaction to the gaudy furnishings of the hotel. Dreiser says: "His ideas of luxury were in the main so extreme and mistaken and gauche--mere wanderings of a repressed and unsatisfied fancy, which as yet had had

nothing but imaginings to feed it" (AT, p. 35). F. O. Matthiessen says: "The vast luxury hotel is a peculiarly fitting symbol for the glamour and the waste of the modern American city."[8] William L. Phillips, exploring Dreiser's allusions to the Arabian Nights tales, feels Clyde's imagination is "capable of transforming vulgarity and gaudiness into exotic beauty."[9] Clyde feels the position he has acquired is "fantastic, Aladdinish, really" (AT, p. 53).

Satisfied with the amount of money he is able to keep for himself without his family's knowledge, Clyde is frustrated when he must flee after being involved as a passenger in a hit-and-run accident (AT, p. 144). However, Clyde does not lose his desire to succeed. After another succession of jobs, his big opportunity arrives when his uncle, Samuel Griffiths, offers him a job in his collar factory. In Lycurgus Clyde's vision of the dimensions of wealth and all that he aspires to is symbolized by the Griffiths' home: "Their great house...was the same as a shrine to him, nearly--the symbol of that height to which by some turn of fate he might still hope to attain" (AT, p. 310).

Gatsby also strives to overcome the hindrances of

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[8]Theodore Dreiser, ed. J. W. Krutch, M. Marshall, L. Trilling, M. Van Doren, The American Men of Letters Series (New York, 1951), p. 193.

[9]"The Imagery of Dreiser's Novels," PMLA, LXXVIII (December 1963), 581.

poverty. He leaves home at an early age, moving from job to job, always in search of something better, led on by "the drums of his destiny" (G, p. 100). On instinct, he goes to St. Olaf's College in southern Minnesota, acquiring part-time janitor's work to pay his school expenses. He finds the job and the schooling unfulfilling and too slow, however, and returns to Lake Superior to search for the means of accomplishing his destiny. As previously mentioned, his imagination begins to conceive the "most grotesque and fantastic conceits....Each night he added to the pattern of his fancies until drowsiness closed down upon some vivid scene with an oblivious embrace" (G, pp. 99-100). He works for over a year as a clam-digger and a salmon-fisher on the south shore of Lake Superior before chance offers him an opportune meeting with Dan Cody on Little Girl Bay. As Samuel Griffiths's house becomes a symbol of Clyde's goals, so does Dan Cody's yacht become to Gatsby representative of "all the beauty and glamour in the world" (G, pp. 100-101).

Both Gatsby and Clyde are unfairly deprived or cheated out of fortunes which would have assured them of a more promising future. Gatsby stays with Dan Cody for five years as his personal steward. Cody becomes like a father to Gatsby for he gives him his "singularly appropriate education," and under his influence Gatsby changes from a boy to a man (G, p. 102). When Cody dies, he leaves Gatsby twenty-five thousand dollars which he never gets. Fitzgerald implies that the "legal

device" used against Gatsby is actually illegal. Similarly, Clyde has no part of the Griffiths family fortune. He should have had all the advantages of education and social position which his cousin Gilbert has had, but these have been denied to him. F. O. Matthiessen senses that Clyde's uncle feels "some compunction over his previous neglect of his brother's family."[10] Dreiser says: "Samuel Griffiths, who along with his elder brother Allen had inherited the bulk of his father's moderate property, and this because of Joseph Griffiths' prejudice against his youngest son, had always felt that perhaps an injustice had been done Asa" (AT, pp. 173-174). He feels some guilt at seeing his nephew deprived of what could have been his birthright. This is one of the reasons, Dreiser suggests, that Samuel Griffiths offers Clyde a job in Lycurgus.

Both Clyde and Gatsby are able to climb socially, but they fear that the positions they win may be only temporary. In Lycurgus the employees of the Griffiths Collar Factory respect Clyde because of his surname and his appearance. They see the physical similarity of Clyde to his cousin Gilbert Griffiths, the son of the owner of the factory. Clyde notices when he begins work "the unusual deference paid him--a form of deference that never in his life before had been offered him" (AT, p. 179). He becomes aware that the type of life he

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[10]Matthiessen, p. 195.

desires is no longer so far away from him. Similarly, the early Jay Gatsby is accorded special treatment, but because of a "colossal accident." During the war he joins the army and begins to date Daisy Fay. He is actually invited into her upper class world because his army uniform conceals the class to which he belongs. He realizes that however glorious might be his future as Jay Gatsby, he is at present a "penniless young man without a past, and at any moment the invisible cloak of his uniform might slip from his shoulders" (G, p. 149).[11] Thus, Gatsby realizes his position of prominence is transitory. After the war, he would lose his ticket of admission to Daisy's world. Clyde, on the other hand, knows that the deference paid him is not by the class to which he aspires. He has not yet been invited into that realm, though the chance now seems more likely than before.

Determined that they shall not be deprived of what they feel they must have, both Gatsby and Clyde are willing to go beyond the boundaries of accepted morality. Clyde, knowing that he will never be rid of Roberta, is so obsessed with his dream of success that he plots murder. Even though Dreiser says that Clyde is incapable of committing murder and suffers aversion to it, he does plan in detail how he will

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[11]Concerning Gatsby's uniform, read Richard Lehan, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction (Carbondale, Illinois, 1966), p. 112 and Robert Sklar, F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1967), p. 183.

kill Roberta. Also, Gatsby sees no advantage in the program of self-improvement similar to that of Benjamin Franklin[12] which he began as a young boy. Feeling that this type of behavior is no longer profitable, he turns away from it and becomes a gangster.

The similarities in characterization between Gatsby and Clyde establish that, unbeknown to each other, both Dreiser and Fitzgerald were uniting to create a kind of archetype. Further and more important, the characters are both nationally representative. That is, each may be identified with American youth in particular, and America and its dream in general. In describing Gatsby's restlessness, Nick Carraway explains: "He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American--that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games" (G, p. 64). Lionel Trilling identifies Gatsby with America. He writes: "The question of any literal credibility he may or may not have becomes trivial before the large significance he implies. For Gatsby, divided between power and dream, comes inevitably to stand for America

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[12]Gatsby's schedule is discussed as analogous to the Ben Franklin schedule in Fussell, p. 296 and Jonas Spatz, "Fitzgerald, Hollywood, and the Myth of Success," The Thirties, ed. Warren French (DeLand, Florida, 1967), p. 33.

itself."[13] Nick completes the identification by showing the betrayal of Gatsby's dream to be analogous to that of the Dutch sailors who dreamed of America as a new and glorious world. Similarly, Dreiser makes Clyde representative of American youth at the beginning of the novel by describing his feelings of superiority as "true to the standard of the American youth, or the general American attitude toward life" (AT, p. 18). Dreiser makes the identification again at the end of the novel when he has Clyde, awaiting execution, address "the young men of this country" in a vague attempt at warning others against the aspiration which has led him to the death house (AT, p. 808).

Thus, one major accomplishment of both artists is the interlocking of characterization and theme to represent aspiration in America and the disaster inherent in such a dream. The materialistic success which Clyde and Gatsby hope to achieve is caused in part by the innate sense of destiny each feels. It is also a reaction to the poverty of their early home lives. As the desire for wealth increases, it seems to them that the only way to achieve their dream is by illegal means. By identifying Clyde and Gatsby as representatives of American youth, Dreiser and Fitzgerald seem to be showing the pressure in America to

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[13]Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (Garden City, New York, 1953), p. 242.

succeed and the depth to which America will descend to realize this beautiful dream. Further and more important, both Dreiser and Fitzgerald are attacking the social system itself that encourages such dreams while providing no means by which these dreams may be realized.

CHAPTER II

THE QUALITY OF THEIR DREAMS

Clyde and Gatsby, because of their initial poverty and their desires to better themselves, first see their possible aspiration in terms of material goods. It seems to them that wealth is the most important measure of success. Gatsby's aspiration, however, evolves into a spiritual quest as well when his dreams of success are suffused and embodied in a wealthy, young woman. Some years later, after he has accumulated his wealth, Gatsby hopes to use it to lure that woman, Daisy Buchanan, away from her husband, Tom. Clyde's love for Sondra Finchley never contains the spiritual elements of Gatsby's love for Daisy. He continues to view Sondra in the light of his material aspirations.

When Clyde escapes from his sheltered homelife, he is quite naive in many ways. The poverty he has lived in has allowed only necessities. Dreiser says that "there were times, when...they were quite without sufficient food or decent clothes, and the children could not go to school."[1] Because Clyde has never had any luxuries, he begins at age twelve to yearn for the kind of life he sees others enjoying.

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[1]Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (New York, 1964), p. 14. Subsequent references to this novel refer to this edition and will be indicated in the text of this paper.

Dreiser says: "The handsome automobiles that sped by, the loitering pedestrians moving off to what interests and comforts he could only surmise; the gay pairs of young people, laughing and jesting and the 'kids' staring, all troubled him with a sense of something different, better, more beautiful than his, or rather their life" (AT, p. 10).

George J. Becker says of Clyde: "Yearning toward the world of brightness, he makes a soda fountain his first objective, then is drawn to the Green-Davidson Hotel, exchanging the tawdry for the garish and vastly enlarging his chances to see life and to participate in it."[2] His encounters with young people who wear nice clothes and who are allowed to have fun, as well as his observations of the furnishings of the buildings where he works, surprise and fascinate him. At the Green-Davidson Hotel, he gazes on "the various stands about the place--flower stand, news stand, cigar stand, telegraph office, taxicab office, and all manned by individuals who seemed to him curiously filled with the atmosphere of this place. And then around and between all these walking or sitting were such imposing men and women, young men and girls all so fashionably dressed, all so ruddy and contented looking" (AT, p. 47). Clyde is so overwhelmed by the beauty of the hotel that he uses descriptions of its furnishings in expressing his admiration

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[2]Theodore Dreiser: The Realist as Social Critic," Twentieth Century Literature, I (October 1955), 124-125.

for Hortense Briggs. "'An' your eyes are just like soft, black velvet,' he persisted eagerly. 'They're wonderful.' He was thinking of an alcove in the Green-Davidson hung with black velvet" (AT, p. 111). Irving Howe says that the poverty of Clyde's family life and the deprivation of his youth allow him to be easily impressed by the garishness of the hotel.[3]

In one sense, the beauty of the hotel speaks of money and its vulgar uses. Gerald Willen defines the terms of aspiration in An American Tragedy: "Money is the most important means of measurement, and if the individual is to rise, he must, somehow, gain possession of enough of it to secure him a place in the class he desires to enter."[4] Clyde observes the luxuries other people have and becomes determined to accumulate some such privileges himself. Dreiser says of Clyde: "He had always told himself that if only he had a better collar, a nicer shirt, finer shoes, a good suit, a swell overcoat like someboys [sic] had! Oh, the fine clothes, the handsome homes, the watches, rings, pins that some boys sported; the dandies many youths of his years already were! Some parents of boys of his years actually gave them cars of their own to ride in" (AT, p. 19).

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[3]"Afterword," An American Tragedy, by Theodore Dreiser (New York, 1964), p. 825.

[4]"Dreiser's Moral Seriousness," The University of Kansas City Review, XXIII, Spring (1957), 184.

F. O. Matthiessen concludes that Clyde's "'none-too-discerning' mind could so easily be convinced that the chief end of life was having and spending money."[5] In fact, the money which Clyde begins to make at the Green-Davidson awes him more than the beauty of the hotel and the freedom of its guests. Dreiser says: "Even more than by the luxury of the hotel or these youths, whom swiftly and yet surely he was beginning to decipher, Clyde was impressed by the downpour of small change that was tumbling in upon him" (AT, p. 53). The practice of tipping astonishes Clyde, for from four to six dollars a day is a "most amazing pay" to him (AT, p. 37).

This large amount of money, however, increases Clyde's tendencies toward selfishness. He begins to wonder "how, if at all, he was to keep a major portion of all this money he was making for himself" (AT, p. 54). Deciding to lie to his mother about his salary, he is able to buy clothes like those he had admired on the well-dressed young men in the hotel. He also begins to spend money on girls for the first time. His first girlfriend, Hortense Briggs, is at the age where she uses boys to obtain whatever pleasures and clothes she desires (AT, p. 77). Clyde is so infatuated with her, he denies his mother the money she needs to help his unwed

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5Theodore Dreiser, ed. J. W. Krutch, M. Marshall, L. Trilling, M. Van Doren, The American Men of Letters Series (New York, 1951), p. 194.

but pregnant sister Esta, so that he can save the money for Hortense's coat (AT, p. 120).

Forced to leave Kansas City and Hortense because of the car accident, Clyde eventually comes to Lycurgus, New York, where he goes to work for his uncle. He has recently written his mother that he is determined now to succeed (AT, p. 162). Clyde can not be accepted as an equal by the Samuel Griffiths family, however, because he is not wealthy. He envies his cousin Gilbert who looks much like him and wishes he had had the advantages which wealth has accorded Gilbert. Dreiser describes Gilbert as "such a youth, in short, as Clyde would have liked to imagine himself to be--trained in an executive sense, apparently authoritative and efficient" (AT, p. 180). Clyde imagines the full and easy life that Gilbert must live: "No doubt he came and went as he chose--arrived at the office late, departed early, and somewhere in this very interesting city dwelt with his parents and sisters in a very fine house--of course" (AT, p. 183).

Richard Lehan comments that "Clyde's world gets more luxurious as he moves through the novel....The scenes in the novel whet his appetite; and the more Clyde sees, the more he wants."[6] Though Clyde in his loneliness begins an affair

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6"Dreiser's An American Tragedy: A Critical Study," College English, XXV (1963), 187.

with Roberta Alden, he realizes he can never marry her when he meets Sondra Finchley. He seems to stand in awe of Sondra and all the wealth and beauty she represents. Dreiser explains Clyde's feeling for her: "To Clyde's eyes she was the most adorable feminine thing he had seen in all his days. Indeed her effect on him was electric--thrilling--arousing in him a curiously stinging sense of what it was like to want and not to have" (AT, p. 220).

Having already learned how to dance, Clyde begins to take up the sports which he hopes will make him acceptable in her world. More concerned with his appearance than anything else, Clyde learns how to swim and to canoe. Dreiser says: "He was always thinking that if by chance he should be taken up by the Griffiths, he would need as many social accomplishments as possible, and by reason of encountering a man who took a fancy to him and who could both swim and dive, he learned to do both exceedingly well. But canoeing fascinated him really. He was pleased by the picturesque and summery appearance he made in an outing shirt and canvas shoes paddling about Crum Lake in one of the bright red or green or blue canoes that were leased by the hour" (AT, p. 255). He wishes for the opportunity to display his newly formed skills in pleasure outings with the country-club set.

Clyde wants to be a part of the wealthy set of Lycurgus so badly that he reads the society papers of the local newspapers to find out what they are doing. He imagines

"Gilbert Griffiths racing in his big car, Bella, Bertine and Sondra dancing, canoeing in the moonlight, playing tennis, riding at some of the smart resorts where they were reported to be" (AT, p. 301). Clyde's problem, then, arises from his being forbidden to enter the world of the upper class of Lycurgus.

Clyde's desires for wealth, beauty and position have increased as he has seen more of the world. He has moved from poverty in his childhood to the brink of the upper class. Though the possibility of his entering that world is remote, he begins to prepare himself in the event that somehow he might be admitted.

As a result of Sondra's desire for revenge on Gilbert, who has snubbed her, she makes it possible for Clyde to join her crowd in many of their activities. He meets them at several summer resort areas where he takes part in sports such as horseback riding, tennis, golf, and canoeing. When Clyde arrives at Twelfth Lake for a weekend, he is amazed at the agenda of activities planned for the group:

> After dinner, as explained by Sondra, who was over at Bertine's for the occasion, he was to come over with Bertine and Grant to the Casino, where he would be introduced to such as all here knew. There was to be dancing. To-morrow, in the morning early, before breakfast, if he chose--he should ride with her and Bertine and Stuart along a wonderful woodland trail through the forests to the west which led to Inspiration Point and a more distant view of the lake....And after breakfast and a swim she and Bertine and Nina Temple would demonstrate their new skill with Sondra's aqua-

> plane. After that, lunch, tennis, or golf, a trip to the Casino for tea. After dinner at the lodge of the Brookshaws of Utica across the lake, there was to be dancing. (AT, p. 444).

The endless cycle of events, which is normal summer activity for Sondra and her friends, seems like Paradise to Clyde.

When Sondra begins to care for Clyde, his expectations grow to dreams of marriage with her and the resulting change in his social status: "Once he and she were married, what could Sondra's relatives do? What, but acquiesce and take them into the glorious bosom of their resplendent home at Lycurgus or provide for them in some other way--he to no doubt eventually take some place in connection with the Finchley Electric Sweeper Company" (AT, p. 425). Clyde feels no need for expertise in connection with the position he anticipates. In his desire to rise to the top socially, he does not consider the qualifications necessary for such a position, nor the responsibility it entails. Clyde's growing accessibility to this world seems doomed, however, when he finds he has made Roberta Alden pregnant. It seems that the glamorous world which is now so close may, because of this mistake, escape him forever.

While awaiting punishment for her murder on death row, Clyde often remembers how little he had as a youth and how much he had wanted. Dreiser says: "He had longed for so much there in Kansas City and he had had so little. Things--just things--had seemed very important to him" (AT, p. 806).

During the trial, Clyde's lawyer, Jephson, explains Clyde's desires as a "'case of the Arabian Nights, of the enscorcelled and the enscorceller.'" Clyde does not understand his terminology, so Jephson explains clearly just what he means: "'A case of being betwitched [sic], my poor boy--by beauty, love, wealth, by things that we sometimes think we want very, very much, and cannot ever have" (AT, p. 681). He has desired fine clothes and jewelry, a nice house, a glamorous job, and money enough to spend for doing the things that rich people do; but he gets only a taste of these things. Matthiessen states that Clyde has wanted only "to rise in the world, to be a success as measured by money and social position."[7] Becker analyzes Clyde's aspirations correctly, however, when he says: "It is not things alone that Clyde wants, but all the false glamor of which they are the sign."[8] The ease of the life of the rich, as well as the esteem of others for what they do, is what allures and fascinates him most.

Lehan explains that "Clyde...romanticizes the idea of wealth, associates it with beautiful women, and longs for the life of riches and pleasures--which will always be beyond his grasp."[9] Jephson makes Clyde explain why he desired Sondra more than Roberta. Clyde says:

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[7]Matthiessen, p. 191.

[8]Becker, p. 124.

[9]Lehan, "Tragedy," p. 187.

> "Well, you see, it's hard to say. She was very beautiful to me. Much more so than Roberta--but not only that, she was different from any one I had ever known--more independent--and everybody paid so much attention to what she did and what she said. She seemed to know more than any one else I ever knew. Then she dressed awfully well, and was very rich and in society and her name and pictures were always in the paper. I used to read about her every day when I didn't see her, and that seemed to keep her before me a lot. She was daring, too--not so simple or trusting as Miss Alden was--and at first it was hard for me to believe that she was becoming so interested in me. It got so that I couldn't think of any one or anything else, and I didn't want Roberta any more. I just couldn't, with Miss X always before me." (AT, p. 686)

The beautiful, complex world of which Sondra is a part increases his love for her. He longs to be as important and respected as she is.

When Clyde first becomes acquainted with the more socially prestigious world in the Union League Club of Chicago, he observes that "there was no faintest trace of that sex element which had characterized most of the phases of life to be seen in the Green-Davidson, and more recently the Great Northern" (AT, p. 168). Clyde's conclusion is that "probably one could not attain to or retain one's place in so remarkable a world as this unless one were indifferent to sex" (AT, p. 168). Therefore, Clyde begins to imitate the ideals of that institution (AT, p. 198). His sexuality reappears, however, when he decides he must have Roberta Alden. At the same time he is dating the upper-class Sondra, but his desire for her is in no way sexual.

Sondra Finchley represents Clyde's highest aspirations,

and she is to him sexless and innocent. Blanche Gelfant says that "when he is most in love with Sondra Finchley, he is least motivated by the sexual need which had been the main basis for his relationship with Hortense Briggs and Roberta Alden."[10] Concerning Clyde's urge to kiss Sondra, the narrator explains that "the thought was without lust, just the desire to constrain and fondle a perfect object" (AT, p. 365). Later Clyde's lawyer tells of the prisoner's indignation at his questioning Clyde's relationship with Sondra. Charles Shapiro says: "He is horrified by the suggestion that, although he seduced and killed Roberta, he might also have seduced Sondra."[11] Dreiser increases the innocence associated with Sondra by having her use baby talk with Clyde. Matthiessen adequately states that "we have no illusion that we are listening to possible talk" when Sondra babbles: "'Cantum be happy out here wis Sonda and all these nicey good-baddies?'"[12] In contrast to his treatment of Hortense Briggs and Roberta Alden, Clyde sees sex as no part of a relationship with an upper class girl. His love for Sondra, however, though it has some spiritual aspects, cannot be classified as primarily spiritual, for Clyde is primarily

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[10]The American City Novel (Norman, Oklahoma, 1954), p. 69.

[11]Theodore Dreiser: Our Bitter Patriot (Carbondale, Illinois, 1962), p. 103.

[12]Matthiessen, p. 198.

concerned with the material aspects of life.

Gatsby's dream is quite similar to Clyde's in some ways. Since both men live in poverty as youths, it is natural that they would desire money and the beautiful things it could buy. During the war when Gatsby first meets Daisy Fay, he is still awaiting materialistic success. He is much impressed by the world of romance in which she seems to live; "there was a ripe mystery about it [her house], a hint of bedrooms upstairs more beautiful and cool than other bedrooms, of gay and radiant activities taking place through its corridors, and of romances that were not musty and laid away already in lavender, but fresh and breathing and redolent of this year's shining motorcars and of dances whose flowers were scarcely withered."[13] Gatsby begins to realize the security of wealth which Daisy is used to and which he must provide if he is to have her.

During the three years Gatsby collects his wealth, he also conceives a magnificent past for himself. Because of a family tradition, he says, he was educated at Oxford. Then, after his family's death, he is supposed to have "lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe--Paris, Venice, Rome--collecting jewels, chiefly rubies, hunting big

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[13]F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1925), p. 148. Subsequent references to this novel refer to this edition and will be indicated in the text of this paper.

game, painting a little...." During the war he was promoted to the rank of major and decorated by every Allied government (G, pp. 65-66). Not only does Gatsby wish to deny his former poverty, but he also feels he must invent an extraordinary background capable of astonishing his listeners.[14]

Five years before Nick's story takes place, Gatsby kissed Daisy and thereby "forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath.... At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete" (G, p. 112). By making Daisy incarnate with his dream, Gatsby could not achieve his goal of success without possessing her also. Therefore, after the war, Gatsby begins to accumulate the riches that will make him once again able to unite himself with her. Like the daydreams Gatsby has about his past, he buys only the unusual, the fantastic, trying to create a kind of Aladdinish world for himself. Marius Bewley says that "in that heroic list of the vaster luxury items--motor-boats, aquaplanes, private beaches, Rolls-Royces, diving towers--Gatsby's vision maintains its gigantic unreal stature."[15] Gatsby's home, "a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking

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[14]Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise (Boston, 1951), p. 175. Mizener calls Gatsby's rajah story, his "cheap-magazine version of his life." Robert Sklar, F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1967), p. 182. Sklar describes it as "gross sentimentality."

[15]The Eccentric Design (New York, 1958), p. 274.

new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool," was bought from a brewer who "agreed to pay five years' taxes on all the neighboring cottages if the owners would have their roofs thatched with straw" (G, pp. 5, 89). The impressiveness of the colossal mansion was probably one factor which tempted Gatsby to buy it. One of Gatsby's cars was "a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields and glass that mirrored a dozen suns" (G, p. 64). Unlike Clyde, Gatsby does not desire just the ordinary pleasures of the wealthy. Everything he buys is fantastic and unusual.

Though his dream of having Daisy seems almost unattainable, Gatsby tries to win her, according to David W. Noble, by showing her he is "more dedicated to American materialism than her husband is."[16] He begins by giving lavish parties to which he hopes she will some day come (G, p. 80). Aerol Arnold argues that Gatsby's clothing is symbolic. He feels "the gold and silver are wealth symbols, rather obvious ones at that."[17] In attempting to impress Daisy and the wealthy of East Egg with his possessions, Gatsby, as Douglas Taylor

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[16]The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden (New York, 1968), p. 157.

[17]"Picture, Scene, and Social Comment--The Great Gatsby," University Review, XXX, Winter (1963), 114.

points out, disregards "the qualitative points of difference between the self-conscious standards of a superimposed wealth and those ingrained in the certitudes of an aristocratic moneyed class."[18] He cannot understand the proper degree of emphasis that should be put on such things.

Vulgar though Gatsby may be, he is nevertheless motivated by a spiritual vision. At Gatsby's first meeting with Daisy after her marriage, he is eager to show her his multicolored silk shirts (G, pp. 80, 93). Bewley says that actually Gatsby presents them "with a reverential humility in the presence of some inner vision he cannot consciously grasp, but toward which he desperately struggles in the only way he knows."[19] Though he has accomplished his material aims, Gatsby's aspiration has become a spiritual quest wed to the girl of his dreams. During the five years that he does not see Daisy, Gatsby comes to worship her as a perfect object which will make his dreams complete. His love for her is completely spiritual. As Richard Chase states, Gatsby does not have "sexual passion" for Daisy.[20] She is, in fact, Gatsby's embodiment of his dream and inasmuch as Gatsby is America's, of the American dream.

Bewley defines the American dream as "the romantic enlargement of the possibilities of life on a level which

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[18]"The Great Gatsby: Style and Myth," The Modern American Novel, ed. M. R. Westbrook (New York, 1966), p. 65.

[19]Bewley, p. 278.

the material and the spiritual have become inextricably confused."[21] Concerning this, Noble says that "Gatsby still believes that man can bring the spiritual and the material into timeless harmony. For him, Daisy is the earthly symbol of this possibility."[22] Richard Lehan relates this "desire to cling to a sublime and perfect moment" to essentially the spiritual type of romanticism expounded by John Keats.[23]

So it is that after completing his army duties, Gatsby begins to plan how he may obtain the object of his dreams. Nick relates that he "read a Chicago paper for years just on the chance of catching a glimpse of Daisy's name" (G, p. 80). When Daisy and Tom move to East Egg, Gatsby chooses a house just across the bay where he can see the green harbor lights of their dock. Bewley feels that for Gatsby, Daisy ceases to exist in herself, and becomes the green light.[24] She is no longer a person to him; she has become just an ideal--his dream--towards which he aspires. Because of this

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20"The Great Gatsby," The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York, 1957), in Modern American Fiction, ed. A. Walton Litz (New York, 1963), p. 129.

21Bewley, p. 265.

22Noble, p. 156.

23F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction (Carbondale, Illinois, 1966), p. 117.

24Bewley, p. 278.

Gatsby must be disappointed in the reality of Daisy because she cannot measure up to his dream of her.

Bewley says that "Gatsby is incapable of compromising with his inner vision."[25] In a fitting image, Fitzgerald presents Gatsby's awareness of Daisy's failure to live up to his conception as they gaze together across the bay. Nick Caraway muses: "Possibly it had occured to him [Gatsby] that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever.... Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one." (G, p. 94) Later that afternoon Nick realizes that even Gatsby knew that Daisy had "tumbled short of his dreams--not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion" (G, p. 97). Here Fitzgerald presents the same conflict which he was to rephrase in terms of his own life in 1929: "It is sadder to find the past again and find it inadequate to the present than it is to have it elude you and remain forever a harmonious conception of memory."[26] The fleeting quality of the dream is most aptly symbolized in Daisy's name itself, which alludes to the transience of a flower.[27]

The dream which Clyde and Gatsby cherish is an enlargement of the possibilities of life, including social and

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[25]Bewley, p. 282.

[26]Edmund Wilson, ed. The Crack-Up: F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1945), p. 50.

[27]See Lehan, Craft, p. 122 and Sklar, p. 185.

financial success. Clyde's dream is quite materialistic. While rather young, he is led to assume that material wealth is the chief aim in life. His desire for the accumulation of "things" grows as he rises socially. It is not just wealth that he wants, however, but also the prestige and glamor associated with the wealthy. He wants to be a part of a world in which a major concern is what to wear when one plays tennis or golf, or goes canoeing or horseback riding. He wants a job as he imagines Gilbert Griffiths's to be, which would give him the freedom to come and go as he pleases. Clyde surmises that this glamorous life could be his if he could marry into the upper class. In fact, his love for Sondra Finchley is caused partially by the world which she represents to him.

Gatsby, however, wants and needs more than this. The world that he creates for himself is more fantastic--more Aladdinish--than any of Clyde's dreams. In Daisy Buchanan, Gatsby embodies the glamor of the life to which he aspires. Clyde's love for Sondra does not approach the spiritual aspects of Gatsby's love for Daisy, nor Gatsby's intense preoccupation with merging the spiritual and the physical. Gatsby's vision is so unreal that after five years of planning how he can secure Daisy's love, she becomes an ideal abstraction to him. Gatsby's capacity for romantic wonder makes him ask more of Daisy than she or any reality can provide.

CHAPTER III

WHAT THEY DO TO ACHIEVE THEIR DREAMS

In both novels, An American Tragedy and The Great Gatsby, Clyde Griffiths and Jay Gatsby are led to illegal means in pursuing their dreams. Sacrificing the early morality instilled in them as children, Clyde Griffiths and Jay Gatsby perform their deeds with little regret or sense of guilt. The methods which Dreiser and Fitzgerald use in presenting this sacrifice of morality are different because of the differing concerns of each. Dreiser devotes an entire section to the elaboration of the steps leading up to Clyde's prearranged murder of Roberta Alden. On the other hand, Fitzgerald confines his allusions to Gatsby's bootlegging and illegal bond business to a few minor incidents scattered through the novel in meetings with Wolfsheim, telephone conversations with the underworld, and the job offer to Nick. Instead, he concentrates on Gatsby's quest for beauty and his innocence of the void behind social and human values. But though the emphasis varies, both writers suggest fully the extent to which each of their protagonists will violate law and morality in their pursuit of the glamor of the rich.

The underworld activities of the twenties provided a good background for the story Fitzgerald was to tell. In

fact, Richard Lehan shows how closely Fitzgerald alluded to the Fuller-Magee case in portraying the lengths to which Gatsby would go in pursuing his dream. From 1917 to 1922 many businesses sold stock legitimately; but instead of filling the orders, the brokers would keep the money.[1] Lehan suggests that this is the type of bond business in which Gatsby is involved and in which he tries to interest Nick Carraway when he says: "'It wouldn't take up much of your time and you might pick up a nice bit of money. It happens to be a rather confidential sort of thing.'"[2] Lehan explains that in 1922 when Franklin B. Link of Westmoreland, Tennessee, accused Edward Fuller and W. F. McGee of "bucketing" the $1500 he had paid them for Middle States Oil stock, the two brokers declared bankruptcy; however, they gathered their total assets of almost two million dollars and escaped temporarily to the home of their boss, Arnold Rothstein.[3] Henry Dan Piper documents a letter from Fitzgerald to Maxwell Perkins which proves that he modeled Gatsby on Fuller whom he had known in 1922 and 1923 in Great Neck, Long Island.[4]

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[1]Richard D. Lehan, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction (Carbondale, Illinois, 1966), p. 100. See also Henry Dan Piper, F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1965), pp. 113-120.

[2]F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1925), p. 83. Subsequent references to this novel refer to this edition and will be indicated within the text of this paper.

[3]Lehan, Craft, pp. 97-99.

[4]Piper, p. 113. See note p. 312.

In addition, the boss, Arnold Rothstein, corresponds to Meyer Wolfsheim in the novel. Besides his activities as a bookmaker, bootlegger, illegal broker, and owner of a gambling hotel and a racing stable, Rothstein supposedly did fix the World Series in 1919, as Wolfsheim is supposed to have done in the novel.[5]

Fitzgerald suggests, moreover, that there are further criminal activities in which Gatsby is involved. John H. Randall points out that Gatsby was not at all concerned about Tom's revealing him as a bootlegger, for "bootlegging after all was a more or less acceptable business enterprise in the Twenties and did not irretrievably downgrade the entrepreneur on the status scale."[6] Also, Gatsby's bond business, according to Gatsby himself, is done "on the side" (G, p. 83). Therefore, since Tom argues that Gatsby has "got something on now that Walter's afraid to tell [him] about," Randall proposes that Gatsby's big dealings must be in the area of oil. Specifically, he feels Fitzgerald is alluding to the Teapot-Dome scandal of 1922 which most people in the United States would have been familiar with. On April 7, 1922, the Secretary of the Interior, Albert B. Fall, secretly leased a Naval Oil Reserve at Teapot Dome, Wyoming, to Harry F. Sinclair's Mammoth Oil Company. This government swindle

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[5]Piper, pp. 118-119.

[6]John H. Randall, III, "Jay Gatsby's Hidden Source of Wealth," Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, Summer (1967), 248-249.

occurred during the time when Gatsby was accumulating his wealth.[7]

Fitzgerald's allusions to actual events which took place during the twenties increase the validity of a reading of the novel as an indictment of a particular period in American history. However, Gatsby himself never seems to understand the discrepancy between the dream and his sources of wealth that make possible the long pursuit of his dream. John Fraser states that Fitzgerald avoided the illegalities in order to keep the opening vision of Gatsby as a man of dreams. His criminality seems to be "an oddly harmless--almost an innocent--kind of fantasy world."[8] Similarly, Marius Bewley states: "Gatsby never succeeds in seeing through the sham of his world or his acquaintances very clearly."[9] Kermit Vanderbilt agrees that Gatsby is unable "to recognize his complicity in the corrupt world of which he had become a part."[10]

Gatsby never acquires a sense of guilt for what he does. In this respect he seems almost amoral. Nick's dismay at the idea of one man being able to fix the World Series

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[7]Randall, pp. 250-253.

[8]"Dust and Dreams in The Great Gatsby," ELH, XXXII (December 1965), 560.

[9]The Eccentric Design (New York, 1959), p. 271.

[10]Kermit Vanderbilt, "James, Fitzgerald, and the American Self-Image," Massachusetts Review, VI, Winter-Spring (1965), 307.

amuses Gatsby, for he seems to feel that anything is acceptable as long as one does not get caught. When naive Nick asks why Wolfsheim is not in jail, Gatsby replies: "'They can't get him, old sport. He's a smart man'" (G, p. 74). Also, the same implications of amorality are implied when Gatsby attempts to combine his world of fantasy and his world of business. He seems to have no feeling of incongruity for leaving Daisy so that he may talk with a member of the underworld and then none again in coming right back to her afterwards (G, p. 95).

Further, Fitzgerald portrays a more sinister aspect of Gatsby's character than most critics wish to acknowledge. In contrast to Gatsby's essential innocence in believing he could turn back time in order to capture his dream is his appearance as a killer. At one of his parties, one guest asserts: "'One time he killed a man who had found out that he was nephew to Von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil'" (G, p. 61). Later, even the sober and reserved Nick Carraway recognizes Gatsby's startling expression which is the cause of the many rumors circulated about him. Nick remembers that when Gatsby realized Tom Buchanan was investigating his present business dealings, "he looked--and this is said in all contempt for the babbled slander of his garden--as if he had 'killed a man'" (G, p. 135).

It is ironic that Gatsby's knowledge of the failure of his dream comes at the same time as the breakup of his

criminal world. Just after Gatsby realizes "what a grotesque thing a rose is," Nick inadvertantly learns that one of Gatsby's men is in trouble. An underworld crony of Gatsby reports: "'They picked him up when he handed the bonds over the counter. They got a circular from New York giving 'em the numbers just five minutes before'" (G, pp. 162, 167). A final ironic touch to Gatsby's criminality is the eulogy by Gatsby's father who innocently wishes his son could have lived to emulate the notorious mining and railroad millionaire, James J. Hill[11] (G, p. 169). Robert Sklar comments on the implication behind Gatz's statement: "For all his naïveté there is a grain of truth in the father's admiration, a recognition that for better or for worse men like James J. Hill did build the country, which carries the implication that without these men the country would not have been built."[12]

Gatsby's apparent lack of insight into the immorality of the schemes of which he is a part is comparable to Clyde's lack of compassion for Roberta and his own moral obtuseness. By explaining Clyde's character in terms of heredity and environment, Dreiser is able to show the reasons why Clyde resorts to criminal means of pursuing his dreams.

The confined atmosphere of the Griffiths home makes it especially difficult for Clyde to adjust to the world he

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[11]See Lehan, Craft, p. 106.

[12]Robert Sklar, F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1967), p. 194.

enters as a bellhop at the Hotel Green-Davidson. Dreiser says that "of all the influences which might have come to Clyde at this time, either as an aid or an injury to his development, perhaps the most dangerous for him, considering his temperament, was this same Green-Davidson."[13] It is there that he becomes friends with a group of young bellboys who introduce him to the pleasures of the opposite sex (AT, p. 70). His desire to please Hortense Briggs (in hopes that she will give in to his demands) hardens Clyde and enables him to ignore the plight of his unwed sister Esta who is pregnant (AT, p. 120). Though he wishes he could help his mother and Esta, he desires so much the glamor represented by Hortense Briggs that he excuses his own deceit.

Later, in the morally rigid Lycurgus, New York, loneliness and the sex urge force Clyde to take Roberta secretly, though he knows he will never marry her (AT, p. 287). When she becomes pregnant, his love for Sondra causes him to ask her to abort the baby, and when that does not work, his thoughts turn to abandonment of Roberta and finally even to murder (AT, pp. 373, 416, 440).

However, unlike Gatsby, Clyde does realize the difference between right and wrong. He certainly recognizes a moral code. He writes his mother, for example, after the car

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[13]Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (New York, 1964), p. 47. Subsequent references to this novel refer to this edition and will be indicated within the text of this paper.

accident in Kansas City: "I didn't do anything wrong that time, myself.... But I was afraid they would punish me for something that I didn't do" (AT, p. 162). He regards his determination not to marry Roberta even though he caused her pregnancy as a "low and tricky plan" (AT, p. 438). On reading in the newspaper of an accidental drowning and applying the circumstances to his own situation, Clyde knows his thoughts are "wrong--wrong--terribly wrong" (AT, p. 440). Yet he conceives a plan similar to the accident of which he read--an accident which he hopes will free him once and for all to marry into the glamorous world of Sondra Finchley.

Dreiser allows the reader to see the conflict within Clyde on the day of the planned murder by presenting a dialogue of his weak side tempting him. The reason for this, according to C. T. Samuels, is to enlist the sympathy of the reader. Clyde's conflict is reinforced in the landscape of tall, dead trees and the weir-call of the bird which seems to taunt Clyde.[14] Even though the surroundings suggest death, Clyde can not kill Roberta. In fact, Dreiser explains that murder would have been impossible for Clyde to commit: "Never once did he honestly, or to put it accurately, forthrightly and courageously or coldly face the thought of committing so grim a crime. On the contrary, the nearer he approached a

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[14]"Mr. Trilling, Mr. Warren, and An American Tragedy," Yale Review, LIII, Summer (1964), 635-636. See also Lauriat Lane, Jr., "The Double in An American Tragedy," Modern Fiction Studies, XII, Summer (1966), 216.

final resolution or the need for one in connection with all this, the more hideous and terrible seemed the idea" (AT, p. 467). Nevertheless, Clyde is callous enough to conceive an intricate plan to kill Roberta. Knowing that she cannot swim, he decides to drown her and to make it appear that he, too, has drowned. The darker side of Clyde's self tells him:

> Pick a boat that will upset easily--one with a round bottom, such as those you have seen here at Crum Lake and up there.
>
> Buy a new and different hat and leave that on the water--one that cannot be traced to you. You might even tear the lining out of it so that it cannot be traced.
>
> Pack all of your things in your trunk here, but leave it, so that swiftly, in the event that anything goes wrong, you can return here and get it and depart.
>
> And take only such things with you as will make it seem as though you were going for an outing to Twelfth Lake, not away, so that should you be sought at Twelfth Lake, it will look as though you had gone only there, not elsewhere.
>
> Tell her that you intend to marry her, but after you return from this outing, not before.
>
> And if necessary strike a light blow, so as to stun her--no more--so that falling in the water, she will drown more easily. (AT, p. 471)

However, much truer and more revealing of his character than murder is his actual action--the cowardly abandonment of Roberta as she drowns. As he watches her struggle in the water, a voice at his ear tells him that her living would make his life not worth while from then on. So, in his concern for himself, he swims off to let her die, leaving one of his straw hats on the water to give the appearance of a double tragedy.

Clyde's callous indifference is emphasized by the fact

that he can leave Roberta to flee immediately into the arms of Sondra Finchley. He arrives at the Cranston lodge early enough the day after the accident to play golf with Sondra, Burchard Taylor and Jill Trumbull. With some reservations, Clyde joins in the activities which include swimming and dancing before returning to the Cranstons's. The following day a group including Sondra and Clyde leave on an extended camping trip to Bear Lake. After singing around an open fire, Clyde and Sondra are able to sneak off to kiss and talk before bed. Clyde often thinks how wonderful the trip could be if he were not worried about the accident at Big Bittern. He is not so concerned over leaving Roberta to drown, however, as he is concerned that he will lose this wonderful life which is now open to him. On Sunday the group follows "the usual program of activities--lunching, swimming, dancing, walking, card-playing, music" (AT, p. 548). But the glamor of the trip ends Monday when Clyde is arrested for murder.

Clyde's inner struggle as to whether or not he is guilty continues throughout his prison term. Finally, Clyde reveals the true story of what happened to Reverend McMillan who tries to convince him that he is guilty:

> "Yes! Yes! Tst! Tst! Tst! If she drowned you could go to that Miss X. You thought of that?" The Reverend McMillan's lips were tightly and sadly compressed.
> "Yes."
> "My son! My son! In your heart was murder then."
> (AT, p. 795)

However, just as Gatsby never realizes the extent to which

he is involved in lawlessness, Clyde is never truly convinced as to his guilt:

> He had a feeling in his heart that he was not as guilty as they all seemed to think. After all they [the jury] had not been tortured as he had by Roberta with her determination that he marry her and thus ruin his whole life. They had not burned with that unquenchable passion for the Sondra of his beautiful dream as he had. They had not been harassed, tortured, mocked by the ill-fate of his early life and training, forced to sing and pray on the streets as he had in such a degrading way, when his whole heart and soul cried out for better things. How would they judge him, these people, all or any one of them, even his own mother, when they did not know what his own mental, physical and spiritual suffering had been? (AT, p. 798)

Maxwell Geismar reveals the limitations of Clyde's argument by pointing out that Clyde convinces himself of his innocence so thoroughly that he can not realize to what extent he is also guilty.[15]

Though Clyde plots murder, Dreiser points out that he is not entirely at fault for what he does. Similarly, Fitzgerald does not condemn Gatsby for his lawlessness. Rather, both authors find society equally responsible for the dreams which Clyde and Gatsby conceive and the means they use in trying to achieve them.

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[15] Rebels and Ancestors (Boston 1953), p. 360. See also Blanche Gelfant, The American City Novel (Norman, Oklahoma, 1954), p. 79.

CHAPTER IV

THE INDICTMENT OF AMERICA

There is sufficient evidence in The Great Gatsby and An American Tragedy to indicate that both Fitzgerald and Dreiser intended that the novels be, at least in part, vehicles for social criticism. The question is: to what extent are Jay Gatsby and Clyde Griffiths victims of society and to what extent is America indicted?

Since Fitzgerald presented such characters as Tom and Daisy Buchanan, Meyer Wolfsheim, the previous owner of Gatsby's house, the three Negroes driven by a white chauffeur, and those who drank Gatsby's bootlegged liquor at his parties, it is probable that he was reflecting the era of the twenties with all its discordance and get-rich-quick schemes in order to point out the deficiencies in the American social system. Fitzgerald's reliance on real circumstances of the twenties as background for Gatsby's business reinforces the idea that American society is to be indicted. Henry Dan Piper feels that "the files of the Fuller-McGee case prove concretely what The Great Gatsby implies directly: that society leaders, financial tycoons, politicians, magistrates, pimps, jurors, lawyers, baseball players, sheriffs, bond salesmen, debutantes, and prostitutes--all shared in some degree the responsibility

for Gatsby's fate."[1]

Because of the essential innocence of Gatsby's vision, he does not fit into the aristocratic class represented by the Buchanans and Jordan Baker. Gatsby aspires to this world because he thinks that it will provide the appropriate surroundings for the fulfillment of his vision. The amorality of the class is shown through Jordan Baker's lies, Tom Buchanan's deceit, and the recklessness of Jordan, Tom, and Daisy. Not only does Jordan Baker cheat at professional golf, but also she, like Tom, is a careless driver.[2] Tom's infidelity to Daisy is first disclosed when he wrecks his car while out with a chambermaid in California (G, p. 78). Daisy is also careless and not willing to accept the responsibility for killing Myrtle Wilson (G, p. 180). The final betrayal is the disclosure by Tom of Gatsby's name to Wilson as the owner of the car which killed his wife. Marius Bewley says that Daisy's final betrayal of Gatsby is presented "on a symbolic level where it is identified with and reflects the failure of Gatsby's decadent American

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[1] F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1965), p. 120.

[2] F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1925), pp. 58, 59. Subsequent references to this novel will be indicated within the text of this paper. The careless driver theme is pointed out in John W. Aldridge, "The Life of Gatsby," in Twelve Original Essays on Great American Novels, ed. Charles Shapiro (Detroit, 1958), 219-220 and Otto Friedrich, "Reappraisals--F Scott Fitzgerald: Money, Money, Money," American Scholar, XXIX, Summer (1960), 399.

world."[3] Martin Kallich agrees that "the class he so uncritically admires betray him."[4] Michael Millgate explains Fitzgerald's intentions for her betrayal: "In stressing the corruption at the heart of Gatsby's dream, as well as exposing through the presentation of Daisy, the tawdriness of what the dream aspires to, Fitzgerald clearly intended a fundamental criticism of the 'American Dream' itself."[5] Douglas Taylor states: "His [Gatsby's] personal tragedy is his failure to understand the complex quality of the mind and motives which go into her [Daisy's] fine-seeming world of wealth, for he is captivated by the delightful, exquisitely ordered surface without discerning the behind-the-doors ruthlessness, the years of infinite duplicity and subterfuge that a shrewd, self-preoccupied class has practiced to preserve the power and well-being such a surface implies."[6] Gatsby's lack of insight into the duplicity of the world to which Jordan Baker and the Buchanans belong is his final tragedy.

Fitzgerald also points out the indifference of the residents of East Egg and West Egg. Kermit Vanderbilt says

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[3] The Eccentric Design (New York, 1959), p. 279.

[4] "F. Scott Fitzgerald: Money or Morals?" The University of Kansas City Review, XV, Summer (1949), 274.

[5] American Social Fiction (New York, 1964), p. 109.

[6] "The Great Gatsby: Style and Myth," The Modern American Novel, ed. M. R. Westbrook (New York, 1966), p. 66.

that the America Fitzgerald portrays seems beautiful, clean, and pure at first; but soon the dust of the wasteland appears along with the immoral guests at his parties.[7] Bewley comments that they come to Gatsby's house not because they are his friends (many were not invited and did not even know Gatsby), but because of the "free party, the motor-boats, the private beach, the endless flow of cocktails."[8] Frederick J. Hoffman explains the meaning of the obscene word scrawled on Gatsby's steps as "an act of indifference, symbolic of the obscene indifference shown by the scores of people who had feasted at Gatsby's board, drunk his champagne, and disappeared when the news of his death spread."[9] The unconcerned guests reveal their callousness by accepting Gatsby's hospitality and then assuming no responsibility at his death.

Nick finds he is the only one who will assume the responsibility of planning the details of Gatsby's funeral. Hoffman points out that though Gatsby is "coarse, vulgar, ostentatious; he is associated with the principal leaders of New York's underworld; he has made his fortune in several illegal manipulations," Nick still comes to feel that Gatsby is "worth the whole damn bunch" of people who come to his parties (G, p. 154).[10] Thus, Nick defends Gatsby because

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[7]"James, Fitzgerald, and the American Self-Image," Massachusetts Review, VI, Winter-Spring (1965), 293.

[8]Bewley, p. 274.

[9]The Twenties (New York, 1955), p. 141.

of his intense imaginative sensibility which stands in contrast to the indifference of the other East Egg and West Egg residents.

Through the indifference of the rich, Fitzgerald indirectly indicts and condemns America and its social system. Hoffman states that Fitzgerald's final judgment of America "would have been that the failure [of Gatsby's dream] resulted from a fundamental lack of a clear moral sense, a lack really of cultural tact, which had caused men in the very beginning to have the wrong dreams, and which gave them no proper way of judging them."[11]

Fitzgerald also equates the failure of the dream with the failure of the hopes and dreams conceived by the founders of the nation through Nick's final commentary of Gatsby's wonder: "Gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors's eyes--a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams" (G, p. 182). The fact that Gatsby's aspiration was doomed before it began, just as was America's, makes his quest an almost mythical one in search for romantic wonder.[12] But, as

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[10] Ibid., p. 140.

[11] Ibid., p. 135.

[12] Richard Chase, "The Great Gatsby," The American

Fitzgerald shows, America is not equal to the dream that Gatsby imagines for it. The reality of America, Fitzgerald seems to say, is a social system corrupt and uncaring--a social system that has lost contact with fundamental human values.

Clyde Griffiths, like Jay Gatsby, may be equated with American aspiration, but he does not attain the mythical proportions that Gatsby does. Dreiser, instead, points out more precisely the specific faults in the American societal system. Henry F. May explains that the naturalism which grew up in the pre-war period and which continued after the war in the works of Dreiser, was, in part, a reaction to crime and the methods of punishment. The naturalists, feeling that it was environment which caused crime, concluded that vice, crime, and even virtue were meaningless words.[13] Therefore, Dreiser presents Clyde as a victim of the forces of environment, trapped by circumstances over which he has no control.[14] One critic, Frederick J. Hoffman, even goes to the extent of explaining the modern landscape as Clyde's "assailant," showing Dreiser's concern with detailed descrip-

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Novel and Its Tradition (New York, 1957), reprinted in Modern American Fiction, ed. A Walton Litz (New York, 1963), pp. 128-129.

[13]The End of American Innocence (Chicago, 1964), pp. 181-182.

[14]M. R. Westbrook, The Modern American Novel (New York, 1966), p. 19.

tions of cities, hotels and their interiors.[15]

The conflict of An American Tragedy seems to be between the force of Clyde's desires and the moral standards set up by society. Robert Elias states: "It is the attitude and customs of society that force Clyde to embrace Roberta secretly, and it is Clyde's 'ignorance, youth, poverty and fear' that render him powerless to deal with the consequences of his actions."[16] Richard Lehan points out that Dreiser gives two examples of how money could have eliminated Clyde's problems so that he would never have been forced to plot Roberta's murder. Lehan says: "It is ironic that Clyde is condemned by a society that believes in absolute justice, but he lives in a society in which money has created a double standard of justice--where Belknap, unlike Clyde, is saved by his father's money from the unpleasant consequences of a premarital affair..., and where the doctor to whom Roberta first goes has performed abortions for the girls from wealthy families...."[17] Thus, it is this double standard of justice in America which condemns Clyde and tempts him to find his own means of solving his problem.

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[15]"The Scene of Violence: Dostoevsky and Dreiser," Modern Fiction Studies, VI, Summer (1960), 103, 105.

[16]Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature (New York, 1949), p. 223, containg a partial quote from An American Tragedy.

[17]"Dreiser's An American Tragedy: A Critical Study," College English (1963), 190.

Furthermore, the circumstances of the trial emphasize the faults of the American system of justice. In order to insure the party nomination and the election to office of Coroner Heit and Orville Mason, Clyde must be proved to be the murderer of Roberta. Dreiser shows Heit's consideration of the case in this light: "A quadrennial county election was impending, the voting to take place the following November, at which were to be chosen for three years more the entire roster of county offices, his own included, and in addition this year a county judge whose term was for six years."[18] There is little chance that Mason will be elected to this judgeship unless he can distinguish himself in such a case as this. Knowing that if Mason were successful in prosecuting this criminal case, there would be the possibility of a Republican sweep at the polls, Heit withholds evidence from the defense--a letter written from Roberta to her mother (AT, pp. 646-647).

The political situation is also a factor in the determination of Clyde's lawyers. Ira Kellogg, president of the Cataraqui County National Bank and a Democrat, is "not blind to the fact that some reducing opposition to Mason might not be amiss. Fate seemed too obviously to be favoring the Republican machine in the person of and crime committed by

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[18]Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (New York, 1964), p. 500; subsequent references to this novel refer to this edition and will be indicated in the text of this paper.

Clyde" (AT, p. 591). Therefore, he chooses Alvin Belknap for the defense--a politically well-rounded Democrat who is being considered for the same county judgeship that Orville Mason desires (AT, pp. 591-592).

Besides the political situation, Clyde's case is also prejudiced by Mason's "psychic sex scar" (AT, p. 504). Thus, when he finds that Clyde made Roberta pregnant, Mason determines to prosecute Clyde to the limit.

Dreiser points out the injustice of Clyde's trial through several instances. For example, Burton Burleigh is completely convinced as to Clyde's guilt. Fearing that Clyde will not be convicted for lack of sufficient evidence, Burleigh procures from the morgue two threads of Roberta's hair and twines them about Clyde's camera--evidence enough to prove Clyde hit her with the camera (AT, pp. 575-576).

The atmosphere of the trial, moreover, is not fitting for the seriousness of the case. The publication of excerpts of Roberta's letters to Clyde, though it caused a wave of hatred towards him, was not judged a sufficient reason for a change of venue. During the trial, the complete copies of the letters (which were stolen from Mason's office by an intimate of Burton Burleigh's) are sold by vendors to promote public opinion against Clyde (AT, p. 630).

Even the jury which convicts Clyde is not impartial. Dreiser says that with one exception, they were "all religious, if not moral, and all convinced of Clyde's guilt before ever

they sat down, but still...convinced that they could pass fairly and impartially on the facts presented to them" (AT, pp. 638-639). Yet when the jury deliberates and one man is unconvinced as to Clyde's guilt, he is "threatened with exposure and the public rage and obloquy which was sure to follow in case the jury was hung" (AT, p. 737). Therefore, he decides he must also vote against Clyde to save his drug business.

Finally, Clyde's last hope is destroyed when Reverend McMillan decides not to tell the governor that Clyde's whole testimony at the trial was made up by his lawyers. Feeling that Clyde is guilty in the eyes of God, McMillan does not relate the information which could cause a complete retrial and possibly save Clyde's life (AT, p. 803). Sheldon N. Grebstein states concerning this: "It is grimly ironic that Clyde goes to his death still unconvinced in his heart of his guilt, while the Reverend McMillan, closest to him at the end, leaves the death house both convinced of Clyde's guilt and shaken in his belief in the efficacy of his own Christian mission."[19]

Thus, Clyde's tragedy is abetted by American society, and that society is thereby partly responsible for the things

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[19]"An American Tragedy: Theme and Structure," in The Twenties, ed. Richard E. Langford and William E. Taylor (DeLand, Florida, 1966), p. 64. Lehan ("Tragedy," p. 191) points out that most critics wrongly see Dreiser's treatment of McMillan as sympathetic.

Clyde does.[20] H. Wayne Morgan summarizes the problems which cause Clyde's final defeat: "Society made him poor, contrived the stultifying religion that warped his youth, set the social and financial standards that made him think money and social status were life's only goals. Society had devised the legal system that persecuted rather than prosecuted him. It fed the sensationalism that insured him an unfair trial."[21] The story of Clyde Griffiths thereby proclaims the hypocrisy of American society.

This proposition is strengthened by considering the conclusion of An American Tragedy, which shows to what degree the American society is damned. The novel's final chapter is an almost exact repetition of chapter one, the beginnings of Clyde's dream. However, American justice has now eliminated Clyde by means of its electric chair, and in his place with the street preachers is his nephew Russell, destined to repeat Clyde's dream and destruction.[22] Charles Shapiro feels that "the obviously contrived envelope is used

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[20]Charles C. Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis, 1956), p. 211.

[21]American Writers in Rebellion from Twain to Dreiser (New York, 1965), pp. 177-178.

[22]This point is made by Philip L. Gerber, Theodore Dreiser (New York, 1964), pp. 146-147; Lehan, "Tragedy," p. 189; and Strother B. Purdy, "An American Tragedy and L'Etranger," Comparative Literature, XIV, Summer (1967), 255.

by Dreiser to show the continuous nature of the tragedy, in a sense to justify the novel's title."[23] In fact, he sees the resemblances in Russell and Clyde as the final irony of An American Tragedy. Shapiro concludes: "Though Russell, like Clyde, is introduced to us on a beautiful summer's day, he too may very well be brought to trial on 'another miserable, black and weary night. And then another miserable and gray wintry morning.'"[24]

The ending of The Great Gatsby seems almost as pessimistic as Nick concludes: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (G, p. 182). However, the circular pattern of Gatsby[25] allows the reader to return to chapter one and read Fitzgerald's final judgment through Nick's feeling that there is still some hope if the world (meaning America) could come to "a sort of moral attention forever" (G, p. 2). Marius Bewley feels that "The Great Gatsby is a dramatic affirmation in fictional terms of the American spirit in the midst of an American world that denies the soul."[26]

Thus, both Fitzgerald and Dreiser found it necessary to point out the basic deficiencies in the American social system, although there is an essential difference in their

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23 Theodore Dreiser (Carbondale, Illinois, 1962), p. 86.

24 Shapiro, p. 91.

25 Robert Sklar, F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1967), p. 175.

26 Bewley, p. 286.

outlooks. Fitzgerald's view of the future was considerably more optimistic than Dreiser's because of his faith in tradition.[27] Nick Carraway, discouraged by the carelessness and lack of moral values he has seen in the East,[28] returns to the Middle West after Gatsby's death, though just after the war it had seemed like "the ragged edge of the universe" (G, pp. 2-3). Richard Lehan believes that Nick's return is "a kind of emotional retreat to the world of the father," who embodies the old values.[29] Concerning the end of The Great Gatsby, Kermit Vanderbilt states: "Looking beyond the deprivations of the present, the American can yet discover the possibilities of fulfillment in the receding 'orgiastic' future, but only if he can gain, at the same moment, an awakened sense of the redeemable past."[30]

Thus, though their outlooks differ, both Dreiser and Fitzgerald indict the deficiencies in the American social class system. By making Clyde Griffiths and Jay Gatsby nationally representative, the authors are able to combine characterization and theme to show the causes of aspiration in America and the disaster inherent in aspiring to such a

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[27]Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (Garden City, New York, 1953), p. 253.

[28]See Hoffman, Twenties, p. 140 and Sklar, p. 195.

[29]Richard Lehan, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction (Carbondale, Illinois, 1966), pp. 173, 175.

[30]Vanderbilt, p. 303.

dream. It is society which leads the early Gatsby and Clyde to believe that achieving material wealth is the chief end in life. Their desire for success and the glamor of the lives of the wealthy drives them to illegal means in pursuing their dreams. The authors seem to point out that society provides no other way for them to fulfill their aspirations. Finally, the destruction of Jay Gatsby and Clyde Griffiths is the authors' commentary on the impossibility of achieving the American dream and their indictment of the American social class system.

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